4 PART MINI-SERIES

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NATHANIEL DUSK™

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II

• APPLE PEDDLERS DIE AT NOON—PART 4 •

NATHANIEL DUSK II

"Apple Peddlers Die at Noon"

Part 4

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THE JETS OF STEAM HAD A HISS, AS OF A THOUSAND SERPENTS ALL AROUSED AT ONCE AND ISSUING A COLLECTIVE DEADLY WARNING.
THE HOT MIST STUNG MY EYES--
--BROUGHT SLICK RIVULETS OF SWEAT UNDER MY THROAT--
--BURNED LIKE AN OUT-OF-CONTROL GRASS FIRE ACROSS MY STOMACH--
--AND SWEPT ABOUT MY LEGS LIKE A SCALDING GHOST SEEKING ESCAPE.
BUT THE STEAM WAS LOCKED IN BY THE CEILING, THE SAME WAY I WAS.

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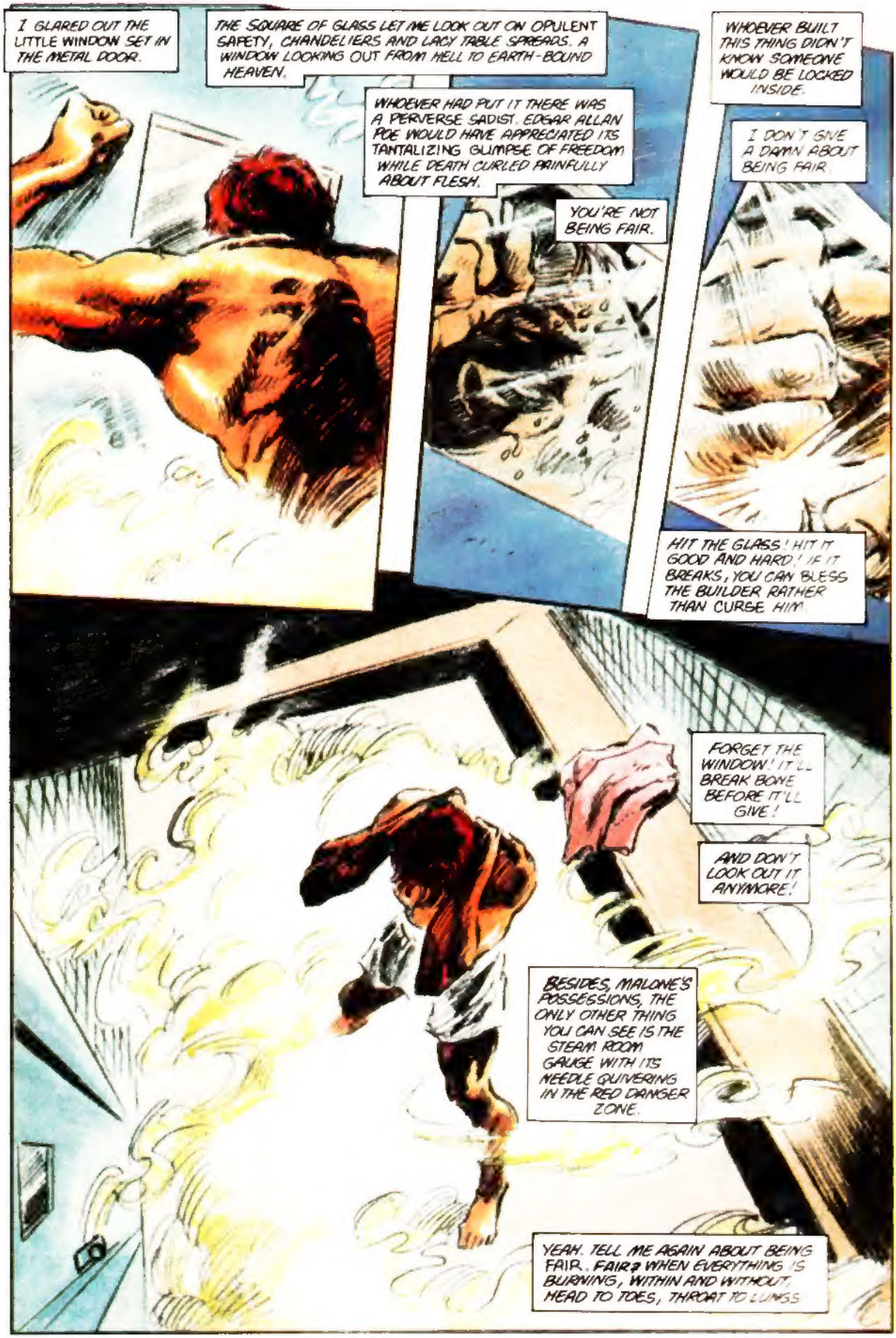

I GLARED OUT THE LITTLE WINDOW SET IN THE METAL DOOR.
THE SQUARE OF GLASS LET ME LOOK OUT ON OPULENT SAFETY, CHANDELIERS AND LACY TABLE SPREADS. A WINDOW LOOKING OUT FROM HELL TO EARTH-BOUND HEAVEN.
WHOEVER HAD PUT IT THERE WAS A PERVERSE SADIST. EDGAR ALLAN POE WOULD HAVE APPRECIATED ITS TANTALIZING GLIMPSE OF FREEDOM WHILE DEATH CURLED PAINFULLY ABOUT FLESH.
YOU'RE NOT BEING FAIR.
WHOEVER BUILT THIS THING DIDN'T KNOW SOMEONE WOULD BE LOCKED INSIDE.
I DON'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT BEING FAIR.
HIT THE GLASS! HIT IT GOOD AND HARD! IF IT BREAKS, YOU CAN BLESS THE BUILDER RATHER THAN CURSE HIM.
FORGET THE WINDOW! IT'LL BREAK BONE BEFORE IT'LL GIVE!
AND DON'T LOOK OUT IT ANYMORE!
BESIDES, MALONE'S POSSESSIONS, THE ONLY OTHER THING YOU CAN SEE IS THE STEAM ROOM GAUGE WITH ITS NEEDLE QUIVERING IN THE RED DANGER ZONE.
YEAH. TELL ME AGAIN ABOUT BEING FAIR.. FAIR? WHEN EVERYTHING IS BURNING, WITHIN AND WITHOUT. HEAD TO TOES, THROAT TO LUNGS

AH, CHRISSAKES! YOU KNEW THAT GLASS WOULDN'T BREAK.

YOU JUST COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE TO DO.

SO WHAT NOW?

GET DOWN LOW! LIE ON THE FLOOR!

OKAY, OKAY! DON'T PANIC.

I'M NOT PANICKING! I AM **NOT** PANICKING!

LOOK! STEAM ALWAYS RISES, DOESN'T IT?

WHO SAYS?

THE EXPERTS!

EVEN YOU NOTICED IT, IDIOT. THE STEAM'S RISING TOWARD THE CEILING!

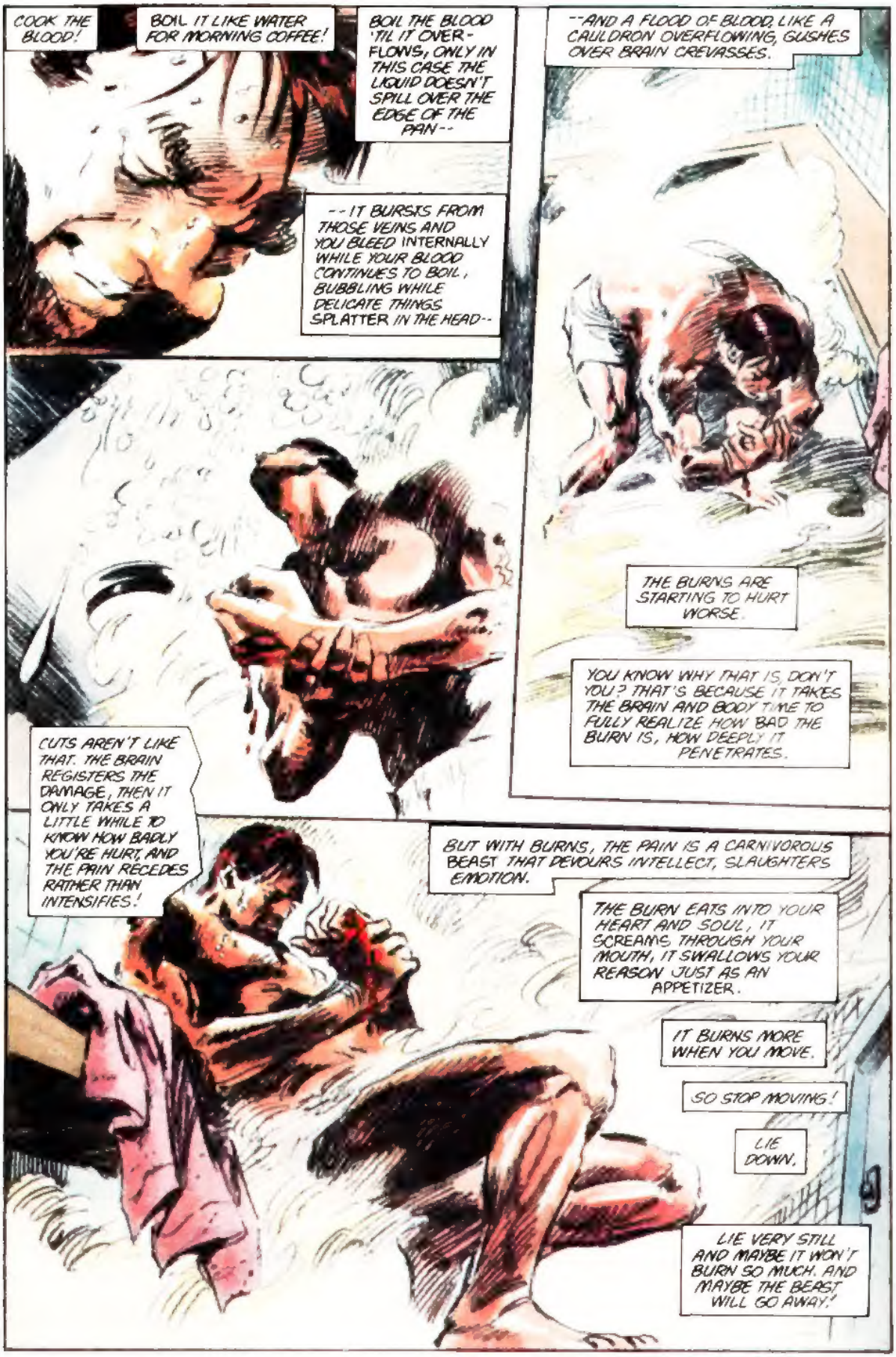
YEAH, BUT IT'S COMING FROM THE FLOOR, DID YOU FIGURE THAT IN YOUR BRIGHT DEDUCTIONS, DUMMY?

I THOUGHT OF IT! I THOUGHT OF IT!

THAT'S WHERE WE HAVE TO STOP THIS ANGRY HISSING STEAM. AT THE SOURCE!

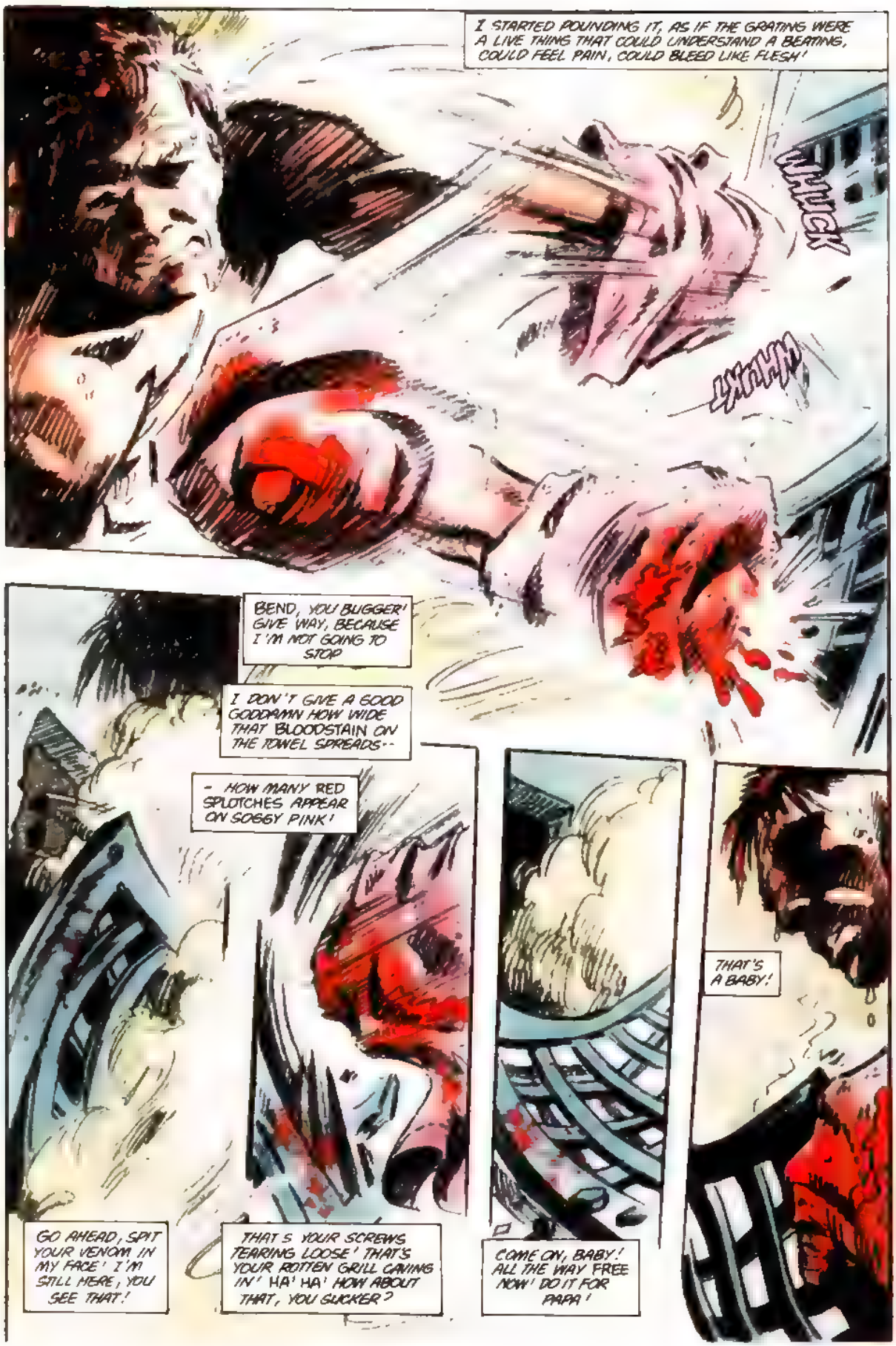
YEAH? AND HOW DO WE DO THAT?
GRAB THIS STUPID THING, WHATEVER YOU CALL IT!
RIP IT OUT OF THE WALL!
OH! OH, GODDAMN IT TO HELL!
LET GO!
GET YOUR HANDS OFF IT! TOO HOT!
HURTS!
OH, GOD, PLEASE, LET IT STOP... HURTING... FOR JUST A MINUTE...
HURTS TOO MUCH... TOO PAINFUL... NO WORDS FOR THIS KIND OF PAIN!
OH, YEAH! YOU THINK THIS PAIN IS BEYOND MEASUREMENT, HUH?
THIS IS JUST THE FIRST BURN, LIKE THE MORNING AFTER BEING OUT ON A JULY BEACH TOO LONG! THIS IS NOT EVEN A SECOND DEGREE BURN. THIS CAN BE MEASURED. YOU WAIT AND SEE!
GIVE THIS STEAM A FEW MORE MINUTES, YOU'LL THINK THIS PAIN IS NOTHING!
SECOND DEGREE BURNS? THIRD DEGREE? HOW DOES THAT GO ANYHOW? WHICH IS WORSE SECOND OR THIRD?
NEVER CAN REMEMBER
DON'T TOUCH THE GRATE AGAIN!
I WON'T, GODDAMMIT! I WON'T!
YOU CAN'T YANK THE DAMN THING OFF! THAT WAS A MORONIC IDEA! DUMB! STUPID!
OKAY. ENOUGH WITH THE NAMES.

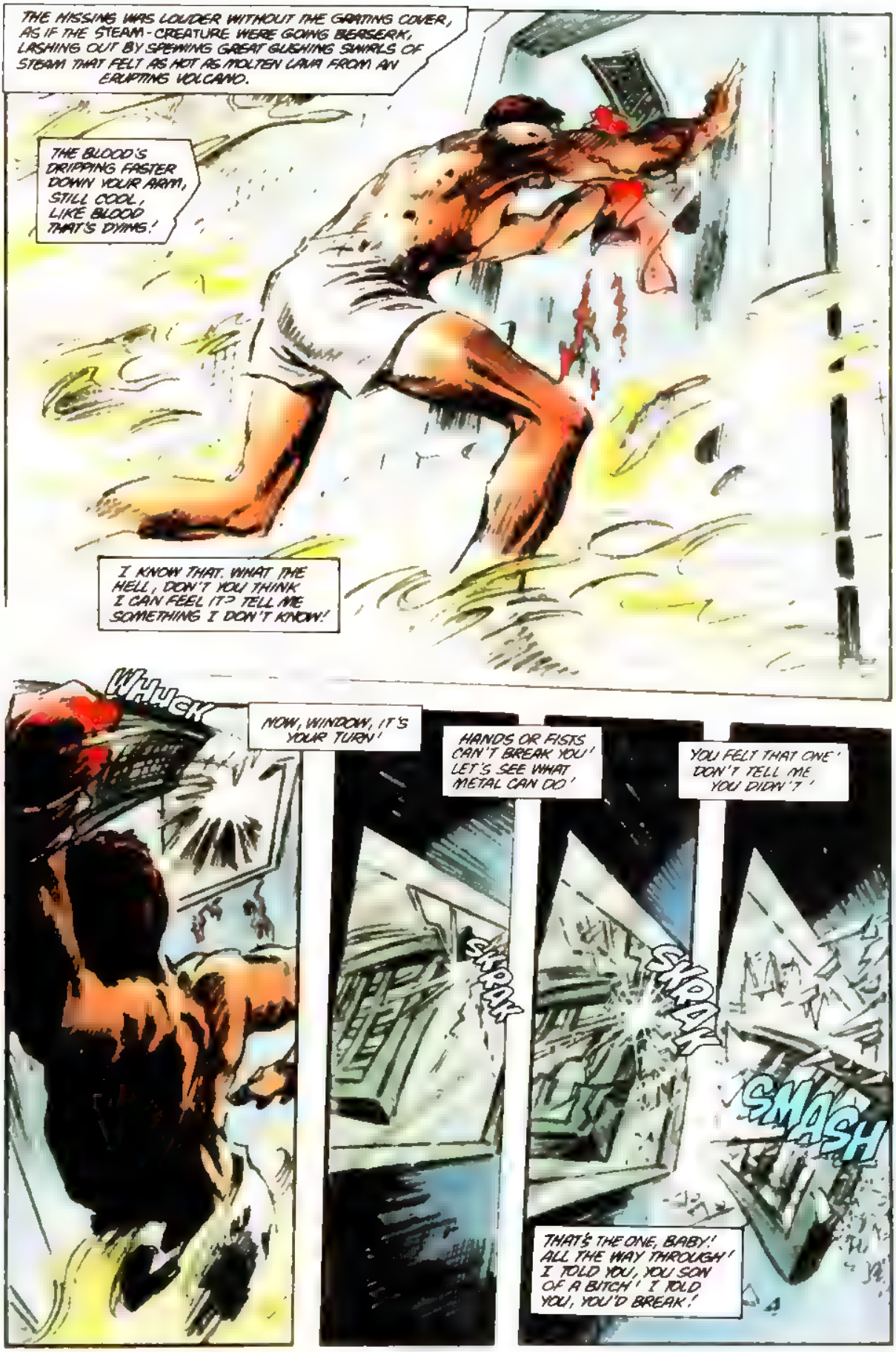
YOU CAN'T GRAB IT!
BUT I'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING!
BATTER IT! BATTER THE SON-OF-A-BITCHING THING!
DON'T STOP! DON'T STOP 'TIL IT BUCKLES! GOD, MY FINGERTIPS STILL FEEL LIKE OPEN WOUNDS GASHED TO THE BONE!
YEAH, BUT IT ISN'T THE METAL THAT'S GIVING WAY. IT'S FLESH! TEARING UNDER THE IMPACT!
GEEZ, THE BLOOD FEELS COOL.
YEAH, WISE GUY! IT IS!
I DON'T THINK IT DOES THAT ANY-HOW. I THINK SKIN JUST GETS PINKER. I THINK THE REAL SCARY THING IS WHAT IT DOES UNDER THE SKIN. TO THE VEINS. TO THE ARTERIES.
WHAT DOES IT DO, SHERLOCK?
IT'S BECAUSE MY SKIN IS BURNING, HOLDING THE HEAT, JESUS, LIKE A FEVER THAT WON'T BREAK! THAT'S WHY MY BLOOD FEELS SO COOL.
WHAT HAPPENS TO FLESH WHEN IT GETS TOO HOT? DOES IT JUST BLISTER? OR MAYBE BURST?


COOK THE BLOOD!
BOIL IT LIKE WATER FOR MORNING COFFEE!
BOIL THE BLOOD 'TIL IT OVER-FLOWS, ONLY IN THIS CASE THE LIQUID DOESN'T SPILL OVER THE EDGE OF THE PAN--
--IT BURSTS FROM THOSE VEINS AND YOU BLEED INTERNALLY WHILE YOUR BLOOD CONTINUES TO BOIL, BUBBLING WHILE DELICATE THINGS SPLATTER IN THE HEAD--
--AND A FLOOD OF BLOOD, LIKE A CAULDRON OVERFLOWING, GUSHES OVER BRAIN CREVASSES.
THE BURNS ARE STARTING TO HURT WORSE.
YOU KNOW WHY THAT IS, DON'T YOU? THAT'S BECAUSE IT TAKES THE BRAIN AND BODY TIME TO FULLY REALIZE HOW BAD THE BURN IS, HOW DEEPLY IT PENETRATES.
CUTS AREN'T LIKE THAT. THE BRAIN REGISTERS THE DAMAGE, THEN IT ONLY TAKES A LITTLE WHILE TO KNOW HOW BADLY YOU'RE HURT, AND THE PAIN RECEDES RATHER THAN INTENSIFIES!
BUT WITH BURNS, THE PAIN IS A CARNIVOROUS BEAST THAT DEVOURS INTELLECT, SLAUGHTERS EMOTION.
THE BURN EATS INTO YOUR HEART AND SOUL, IT SCREAMS THROUGH YOUR MOUTH, IT SWALLOWS YOUR REASON JUST AS AN APPETIZER.
IT BURNS MORE WHEN YOU MOVE.
SO STOP MOVING!
LIE DOWN.
LIE VERY STILL AND MAYBE IT WON'T BURN SO MUCH. AND MAYBE THE BEAST WILL GO AWAY!

YOU LIE HERE AND THESE TILES ARE GOING TO BE A WET AND CLAMMY COFFIN.
SOMETHING WAS DRIPPING ON ME, TINY PIN-POINT BURNS.
WHAT THE HELL WAS THIS?
IT WAS THE CEILING, SWEATING, COVERED WITH HUGE BEADS OF BURNING WATER DROPPING OFF RANDOMLY, SPLATTERING HOTLY.
I WAS AMAZED I COULD FEEL IT OVER THE VASTER BURNING AT MY SHINS AND GROIN AND ARM-PITS AND DEEP INSIDE MY THROAT.
EACH TIME I INHALED NOW, MY STOMACH TIGHTENED AND THREATENED TO HEAVE--
--AND THE FIRE SWEPT DEEPER INTO MY LUNGS, SEEMING TO SINGE THE INTERIOR LINING!
MORE HUGE BEADS DROPPING FROM THE CEILING. COULDN'T BE WATER. HAD TO BE ACID. VERY CORROSIVE ACID! FLESH-EATING ACID!
AND YOU'RE BREATHING IT INTO YOUR LUNGS!
ACID TEARING HOLES INTO LUNGS!
DON'T BREATHE!
GOT TO!

FIRST YOU DON'T WANT ME TO MOVE, THEN YOU DON'T WANT ME TO...
OH, GOD! THE ACID-STEAM'S GOING UPWARD, TOO, BEHIND THE EYES.
IT'S THE BEAST TRYING TO CLAW ITS WAY TO THE BRAIN, A CUNNING BEAST THAT WANTS TO DRAIN THE VITAL LIQUIDS FROM IT--
--LEAVE THE BRAIN DEHYDRATED AND DEAD!
AS DEAD AS THAT TOWEL.
THAT ASSHOLE MALONE PROBABLY LEFT IT IN...
THE TOWEL!
YOU CAN USE THE TOWEL TO PROTECT YOUR HAND FROM THE METAL GRATING!
OKAY, VENT, HISS AND ISSUE YOUR VENOM! I'M NOT CRAWLING AWAY FROM YOU!
YEAH, SURE! I'm AFRAID OF YOU! DAMNED SCARED, IN FACT.
BUT I AM GOING TO STAY RIGHT HERE IN FRONT OF YOU, YOU MISERABLE BASTARD!
IT WAS MY FATHER WHO HAD TAUGHT ME HOW TO TALK TO MACHINES. HE WAS MORE MECHANICALLY INCLINED THAN I WAS.


I STARTED POUNDING IT, AS IF THE GRATING WERE A LIVE THING THAT COULD UNDERSTAND A BEATING, COULD FEEL PAIN, COULD BLEED LIKE FLESH!
WHUCK
YAHH
BEND, YOU BUGGER! GIVE WAY, BECAUSE I'M NOT GOING TO STOP
I DON'T GIVE A GOOD GODDAMN HOW WIDE THAT BLOODSTAIN ON THE TOWEL SPREADS--
- HOW MANY RED SPLOTCHES APPEAR ON SOGGY PINK!
GO AHEAD, SPIT YOUR VENOM IN MY FACE! I'M STILL HERE, YOU SEE THAT!
THAT'S YOUR SCREWS TEARING LOOSE! THAT'S YOUR ROTTEN GRILL CAVING IN! HA! HA! HOW ABOUT THAT, YOU SUCKER?
COME ON, BABY! ALL THE WAY FREE NOW! DO IT FOR PAPA!
THAT'S A BABY!


THE HISSING WAS LOUDER WITHOUT THE GRATING COVER, AS IF THE STEAM-CREATURE WERE GOING BERSERK, LASHING OUT BY SPEWING GREAT GUSHING SWIRLS OF STEAM THAT FELT AS HOT AS MOLTEN LAVA FROM AN ERUPTING VOLCANO.
THE BLOOD'S DRIPPING FASTER DOWN YOUR ARM, STILL COOL, LIKE BLOOD THAT'S DYING!
I KNOW THAT. WHAT THE HELL, DON'T YOU THINK I CAN FEEL IT? TELL ME SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW!
WHACK
NOW, WINDOW, IT'S YOUR TURN!
HANDS OR FISTS CAN'T BREAK YOU! LET'S SEE WHAT METAL CAN DO!
SKRAK
YOU FELT THAT ONE! DON'T TELL ME YOU DIDN'T!
SKRAK
SMASH
THAT'S THE ONE, BABY! ALL THE WAY THROUGH! I TOLD YOU, YOU SON OF A BITCH! I TOLD YOU, YOU'D BREAK!

I COULD HEAR MY BLOOD POUNDING PAST MY EARS, A RAPID, FRANTIC THUNDERING, A STAMPEDE OF BLOOD SEEKING ESCAPE FROM THE HEAT.
I WONDERED HOW MUCH PRESSURE THOSE BLUE VESSELS COULD TAKE BEFORE ERUPTING
I HEARD SOMETHING MORE DISTANT THAN RUSHING BLOOD IT WAS A VOICE. AN ANIMAL VOICE
A WHIMPERING
HOW ODD
IT WAS, MY VOICE
I WAS THE ANIMAL. MY TEARS WERE LOST IN STREAMS OF SWEAT. CRYING, LIKE A CHILD WITH A SPLINTER IN HIS KNEE WHILE A NEEDLE PROBED FOR IT. FORGET THE STREAMS OF TEARS AND BLOOD.
DON'T WASTE ANY MORE TIME. REACH THROUGH THE HOLE, GET A HOLD OF THE LATCH AND RELEASE THE BOLT. LET'S GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE BEFORE WE'RE DENYDRATED AND MUMMIFIED.
A SPIKED PEAK OF GLARE JABBED INTO MY ARMPIT.
MY LEGS STARTED TO SAG I WAS LIGHT-HEADED. PLEASE, GOD, DON'T LET ME GET THIS CLOSE ONLY TO FALL BACK UNCONSCIOUS!

THE GLASS IN MY ARMPIT DUG A SADISTIC QUARTER INCH DEEPER
JESUS! I COULD JUST REACH THE KNOB MY FINGERTIPS SLIPPED ON MY BLOOD AND SWEAT
COME ON, DAMN IT! TURN! OPEN UP! GET ENOUGH GRIP!
THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN VIOLENTLY, SPILLING ME OUT IN A FLURRY OF ESCAPING STEAM.
I KNELT ON THE PLUSH CARPETS FOR A LONG TIME, WHILE PAIN AND CONSCIOUSNESS FOUGHT A BATTLE THAT EXCLUDED ME
I KNELT THERE KNOWING TIME WAS PASSING, THAT I WAS LOSING IMPORTANT MINUTES I WASN'T QUITE SURE WHY THEY WERE IMPORTANT, BUT IT WAS CONNECTED WITH A SENSE OF IMPENDING DANGER I COULD NOT QUITE DEFINE, BUT KNEW EXISTED.
VERY FASHIONABLE
I WANTED TO CALL MURRAY; I WANTED TO COMMISERATE WITH A FRIEND.
I HAVE TOO FEW FRIENDS, TOO FEW PEOPLE TO TRUST.
BUT MURRAY HAD HIS OWN PAIN, A PAIN THAT WOULD LAST LONGER THAN THESE BURNS.

MURRAY AND BECKY NEEDED TIME TOGETHER TO HELP EACH OTHER, TO EACH REASSURE THE OTHER THAT THEY COULD SURVIVE HER MISCARRIAGE, THOUGH NEITHER WAS SURE THEY COULD.

SO, I WENT ALONE ON MY SEARCH. I PROWLED AROUND THE 132ND ST AREA, THE STREET NUMBER I'D HEARD ABOVE THE STEAM. I ASKED ANYONE WHO WAS AMBULATORY IF THEY KNEW KNOBBY "MEOW" HALLIHAN

AFTER AN HOUR, MY CLOTHES FELT LESS LIKE BARBED WIRE AND MORE LIKE STRAIGHT-EDGED RAZORS WITH DULL BLADES.
I GRITTED MY TEETH IN PAIN, BUT MOST OF THE BAR DENIZENS THOUGHT IT WAS A TOUGH GUY LOOK.

SURE, I KNOW OLD "MEOW" HALLIHAN THAT MICK SURE LOVES THEM KITTIES.
HE'S A PISSER WHEN IT COMES TO PEOPLE, BUT WITH LITTLE PUSSIES, HE'S LIKE A LAMB
HE COOS TO 'EM, PURRS TO 'EM YOU WOULDN'T OUGHTTA BELIEVE IT
I SEEN KNOBBY AND HIS MRS, THEY GOT A SLEW OF KIDS, SO NO DOUBT KNOBBY PUTS IT TO HER - BUT I SWEAR--

--SOMETIMES I THINK HE'D RATHER HOP INTO BED WITH THEM CATS.
THE OLD LADY, HE'LL GIVE HER THE BACK OF HIS HAND. THE CATS HE KISSES AND PETS YOU NEVER SEEN NOTHING LIKE IT
I'VE GOT A CAT FOR HIM! CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE HE LIVES?
SURE! HIS PLACE'S ONLY RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET
11:39 a.m.
KNOCK KNOCK
THE HALLIHANS LIVED IN A LOW-RENT APARTMENT HOUSE THAT HAD A SENSE OF ISOLATION, DISCONNECTION FROM THE TENANTS ON OTHER FLOORS.
SHE LOOKED WEARY, LIKE A SOLDIER WHO HAS BEEN IN THE TRENCHES FOR MONTHS
HER EYES HELD NO HOPE FOR THE FUTURE, JUST A BLEAK RESIGNATION
THIS IS WHAT MY LIFE IS, HER EYES SAID, PLAINTIVELY, FOR THE NEXT FIFTEEN YEARS, AND MAYBE LONGER IF I BECOME PREGNANT AGAIN.
YES?
LIFE NEVER SEEMS TO MAKE MUCH SENSE HERE WAS A WOMAN SUFFOCATING IN KIDS WHILE REBECCA ABRAHAMS WAS IN AGONY BECAUSE SHE'D NEVER BEEN ABLE TO HAVE ONE
I'M HERE TO SEE "KNOBBY" HALLIHAN
OH, HE'S NOT HERE. HASN'T BEEN HOME FOR QUITE SOME TIME

I RECOGNIZED THOSE OVER-SIZED BROGUES
I SLAMMED THE DOOR INTO HIS FACE IT COULDN'T MAKE IT ANY UGLIER
YOUNG, IMPRESSIONABLE EYES WATCHED, AGOG.
SMUKK!

THE FIERCEST PAIN WAS FROM THE GASH IN MY ARMPIT. PAIN THAT STABBED LIKE A DAGGER. IT WAS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT IT WOULD BE A WOUNDED ARMPIT THAT DID ME IN, BEFORE THE BLURYS OR ANYTHING ELSE.

CATS WENT WILD, LEAPING, SCREECHING. I WISHED CLYDE BEATTY WERE AROUND TO QUIET THEM DOWN

I COULD FEEL HIS WIFE AND KIDS WATCHING ME BEHIND MY ANGER AND FEAR, I FELT A DISQUIETING SHAME. I DID NOT LIKE TRYING TO BREAK A MAN, EVEN THIS MAN IN FRONT OF HIS FAMILY.

I WAS THE VIOLATOR OF THIS HOME AND SANCTUARY, NOT TO MENTION WILDLIFE PRESERVE.
H-HOW.. HOW'D YOU GET OUT OF THAT THERE STEAM ROOM? "LICE" SAID YOU COULDN'T NEVER.

"LICE" DOESN'T KNOW EVERYTHING BUT IT WASN'T EASY'
GET OUT OF THE WAY, CAT I DON'T WANT ANYTHING BETWEEN YOU AND ME, KNOBBY YOU MIGHT GET IDEAS
YOU LEAVE THEM KITTIES OUTTA THIS!
I KNEW HOW TO GET TO HIM, CUT THROUGH ALL THE CRAP. HE HADN'T SHOWN ANY CONCERN FOR HIS WIFE AND KIDS, BUT A SIMPLE SWIPE AT A CAT HAD HIS VOICE TREMBLING WITH TERRIBLE EMOTION
THERE'S NOTHING TO FEEL PROUD ABOUT WHEN YOU TURN A MAN'S WEAKNESS AGAINST HIM. WE ALL HAVE WEAKNESSES. THERE IS A COST WHEN WE IGNORE OUR OWN AND CAPITALIZE ON OTHERS'
BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE COST SEEMS WORTH THE PRICE
TERRIBLE THING ABOUT CATS IS ALL THE BAD THINGS THAT CAN HAPPEN TO THEM
YOU KNOW, I HEARD SOME FOLKS PUT THEM IN SACKS, FILL IT WITH ROCKS, GO TO THE RIVER...
WELL YOU KNOW THE REST
I EVER CATCH ANY BASTARD DOING THAT, I'LL CARVE HIS THROAT OPEN TO THE WINDPIPE!

OR CATS, THEY CAN FALL OUT APARTMENT WINDOWS TERRIBLE THING TO HAPPEN TRAGIC
'COURSE, LOTS OF FOLKS THINK CATS HAVE GOT NINE LIVES AND WILL LAND ON THEIR FEET

IT S POSSIBLE, I SUPPOSE
HEY, NOW ' YOU AIN'T GONNA HURT MY KITTIES, ARE YOU ?

NOT IF YOU SPILL YOUR GUTS, KNOBBY
OKAY OKAY YOU BRING LITTLE JAKE BACK IN

HILDA YOU TAKE THE KIDS AND BEAT IT ' GET YOURSELVES AN ICE CREAM, OR SOMETHING

I WAS GLAD THEY WENT THEY WEREN T PART OF THIS WORLD KNOBBY AND I INHABITED

I'LL EVEN START THE STORY OFF FOR YOU, KNOBBY. GIVE YOU THE BACKGROUND YOU NEED.

I HAD IT KIND OF WRONG THIS MORNING, DIDN'T I?

IT SN'T JOHN MALONE WHO S BEEN DEALING WITH YOU AND 'LICE"

JOHN WAS *SURPRISED* TO SEE YOU TWO THIS MORNING

SEEMS LIKE YOU AIN T SUCH A SMART COOKIE, PEEPER

YEAH IT TOOK ME AWHILE TO PUT IT ALL TOGETHER UNCLE JOHN, HE'S KIND OF LIKE THE PUPPET MASTER, BUT ONE WHO DOESN'T REALLY THINK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HE STARTS PULLING STRINGS

SO EVEN THOUGH HE'S THE *REAL INSTIGATOR* OF EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED, I'LL BET HE NEVER INTENDED FOR IT ALL TO BECOME SO VIOLENT

HE THREW OUT LITTLE HINTS... VEILED THREATS TUGGED THE STRINGS HE WANTED CRANSTON OUT OF THE WAY NOT NECESSARILY DEAD JUST NO LONGER A PROBLEM.

BUT OLD JOHN... HE NEVER IMAGINED HOW *FAR* THIS WOULD GO. OLD JOHN DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH IMAGINATION TO SEE BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE HIS WILDEST FANTASY IS AN UNLIMITED TRUST FUND SO WHAT OLD JOHN DID WHEN CRANSTON STARTED TO TRY TO *MILK* HIM WHEN CRANSTON TOOK THE PHOTO AND THREATENED TO EXPOSE HIS CONNECTIONS WITH YOUR BOSS, ROTHBERG .. HE PASSED THE BUCK.

HE TOLD VALENTINE THAT HE'D BETTER RESOLVE THE SITUATION. THAT IF HE DIDN'T, HIS EXPENSIVE TASTES FOR PLANES AND CARS WOULD PLUMMET LIKE BANK SHARES.

THAT HE WOULD FIND HIMSELF OUT ON THE STREETS, THE WAY CRANSTON DID

WHAT MALONE PROBABLY DIDN'T FIGURE, GENIUS THAT HE IS, IS THAT VALENTINE WOULD PANIC, THAT THE ONLY SOLUTION VALENTINE COULD COME UP WITH WAS TO KILL CRANSTON

IT MUST HAVE SHOCKED MALONE WHEN HE HEARD ABOUT THE MURDER ATTEMPT ALMOST AS MUCH AS IT SHOCKED VALENTINE WHEN HE LEARNED HIS WIFE HAD HIRED A DETECTIVE TO PROTECT HER FATHER HE'D CROOKED A GUN FROM THE COMPANY COURIER GANNON MCALISTER
VALENTINE WAS TRYING TO BE CLEVER HE DRESSED HIMSELF UP IN ONE OF THE COMPANY WORK UNFORMS, NOTHING LIKE HIS USUAL ATTIRE, WHEN HE MADE THE MURDER ATTEMPTS BUT VALENTINE WAS LOUSY AT IT, A REAL DUD
AND NOW HE WAS REALLY PANICKING THAT'S WHEN HE WENT OVER UNCLE JOHN'S HEAD HE TURNED TO ROTHBERG AND SPILLED THE WHOLE DEAL THAT'S WHEN ROTHBERG SENT FOR YOU AND LICE
EVERYONE HAD TOO MUCH TO LOSE THERE WAS TOO MUCH MONEY DOWN THE DRAIN IF THIS DEAL FELL THROUGH SO CRANSTON HAD TO DIE
BUT EVEN DEAD, THE THREAT WASN'T OVER VALENTINE REALIZED I'D RECOGNIZED THE COMPANY UNIFORM AND HE KNEW I'D FOUND THE BULLET HE'D FIRED FROM GANNON'S GUN
VALENTINE ISN'T LIKE MALONE HE DOES HAVE AN IMAGINATION, A VIVID ONE SO VALENTINE CALLED ME
HE NEEDED A RELIABLE WITNESS A GULLIBLE DUPE HE FIGURED I WAS CHOICE FOR THE ROLE OF WITNESSING HIS FRAME-UP OF GANNON
HE GOT GANNON OVER TO THE MALONE MANOR UNDER ONE PRETEXT OR ANOTHER OR MAYBE GANNON WAS ALREADY THERE GOING OVER THE BOOKS AS VALENTINE'D SAID
THE WAY VALENTINE MUST HAVE WORKED IT, HE MUST HAVE TOLD GANNON IT WAS HIS GUN THAT HAD BEEN USED IN THE MURDER ATTEMPTS ON CRANSTON AND THAT I HAD THE SPENT BULLETS FROM IT.
"VALENTINE TRIED TO TIME IT ALL FOR MY ARRIVAL ALL I SAW WERE TWO BODIES GRAPPLING ON THE TERRACE
"VALENTINE COULD HAVE BEEN SUPPORTING GANNON'S BODY I HAVE A FEELING HE'D SHOT GANNON BEFORE I GOT THERE, THAT GANNON WAS ALREADY DEAD WHEN HE FIRED THE SHOT I HEARD.

THEN AFTER HE FIRED THE GUN
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY ENOUGH FOR HIM TO DUMP IT OVER THE RAILING
BUT HE WAS GETTING TOO CLEVER HE COULDN'T HAVE THE BULLETS MATCH CANNON'S BODY SO HE HAD LOADED IT WITH A BLANK CARTRIDGE IT SOUNDED LIKE THE REAL THING BUT I SAW A SECOND POWDER BURN ABOVE THE WOUND
BUT THEN I TOLD MYSELF IT COULDN'T BE THAT BECAUSE I COULDN'T FIT IT IN WITH ANY THEORIES I HAD I WAS SO SURE IT WAS JOHN MALONE THAT WAS THE KILLER I WANTED IT TO BE HIM, SO I PERSUADED MYSELF THAT SMUDGE WAS SOMETHING ELSE IT WASN'T UNTIL I REALIZED JOHN MALONE DIDN'T KNOW YOU AND 'LICE THAT I STARTED TO RETHINK THE SITUATION
IT HAD KEPT NAGGING ME HOW LICE SHOWED UP AT GRAND CENTRAL STATION WHEN I WENT THERE TO GET CRANSTON'S BLACKMAIL MATERIAL SO HOW'D LICE KNOW WHERE I WAS? ONLY TWO PEOPLE KNEW I WAS GOING THERE
AMANDA
AND VALENTINE
SO IT HAD TO BE HIM BECAUSE IT SURE AS HELL WASN'T AMANDA
NOT BAD SNOOP YOU GOT THAT KID PEGGED PRETTY GOOD HE'S A REAL CORKER
YOU KNOW WHAT HE TOLD ME 'LICE HE'S GOT A NEW PLAN
YOU KNOW THAT PHILLY OF HIS, THE LOOKER? HIS OLD LADY? HE'S KNOCKIN HER OFF NEXT NO KIDDIN'!
SAID HE WAS GONNA HAVE HER
TAKE A DIVE OFF THE ROLLER COASTER AT CONEY ISLAND THAT KID'S SURE A PIP! I THINK EVENTUALLY MR ROTHBERG'S GONNA HAVE ME AN 'LICE CLIP HIS WINGS PERMANENTLY

HEY!
I WHACKED HIM WITH THE GUN BARREL IN THE MOVIES THEY ALWAYS TURN THE GUN AROUND AND USE THE BUTT
IT'S A GOOD WAY TO END UP SHOOTING YOURSELF "THE GUN DISCHARGED UNDER THE IMPACT"
I GOT THE CONEY ISLAND PRECINCT NUMBER THE VOICE OF A HOLIDAY-HARRIED DESK SERGEANT "CAME TO MY EAR
LISTEN
AT CONEY ISLAND? WHAT ARE YOU FELLAS DAFT? HALF OUR PRECINCT IS OUT THERE ON THE BEACH NOW ARRESTING THEM GUYS WEARING THEM BARE CHESTED BATHING TRUNKS
THE CAME INTO THE APARTMENT QUICK AND READY HE HEARD FOUR SCUFFLING AND RAISED VOICES
LOOKING INTO HIS DEAD EYES, IT WAS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE "LICE" HAD SOME COMMON HERITAGE WITH THE HUMAN RACE, THAT HE WAS ONCE A BABY HAD LIVED A CHILDHOOD
"LICE" WAS AN PROFESSIONAL KILLER IT WAS WHAT HE WAS AND ALL HE WAS, AND IN THE HUMID, CLOSE QUARTERS OF THE APARTMENT IT MADE HIM A SUNCIT NIGHTMARE

GIMME THE PHONE MAKE IT NATURAL
I'M NOT EVEN GET TO SAY HOLD BY
AH! FORGIVE ME, SGT IT'S THE 4TH I WAS JUST HAVING ME SOME FUN
SORRY TO'VE BOTHERED YOU
NOW, YOU, PEEPER YOU DROP THE ROSCOE NICE 'N POLITE THEN YOU TELL ME WHY I GOTTA MAKE IT A HABIT KILLING YOU
CLIK
AS HIS EYES WATCHED THE GUN LEAVE MY HAND, I DOVE FOR THE SOFA I WAS THE PRESSURE OF A FINGER ON A TRIGGER AWAY FROM BEING DEAD, AND CLOTH AND MATTRESS STUFFING WOULDN'T STOP THOSE STEEL JACKETED BULLETS, BUT IT WAS A BETTER BARRIER THAN NONE
THE CATS WERE QUICKER THAN I, AS IF THEY KNEW THE SCORE
I WISHED I COULD GET THE GUN BACK
CHA-DA-DA-DA
I WISHED I HAD A PLAN HOW TO GET OUT OF HERE ALIVE.

THE BULLETS WERE TEARIN UP EVERY THING, ALL THE LITTLE TOUCHES MRS HALLIHAN HAD DONE TO MAKE THIS PLACE HOME
THE CAT!
KNOBBY'S KITTIES!
I HURLED ONE OF THEM HIGH AND WIDE I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO FEEL SORRY FOR THE LITTLE BUGGER
I PRAYED HE WOULD HIT THE MARK
THE CAT'S CLAWS RAKED "LICE'S" FACE, AND BLOOD, THE SAME COLOR THAT HAD SPILLED FROM HIS VICTIMS, SPIT INTO THE AIR
I GUESS HE WAS HUMAN, AFTER ALL
"LICE" WENT BERSERK I'D NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT HE SHOT AT THE CAT AS IF IT WERE A HUMAN ENEMY GLASS SHATTERED WOOD TORE THERE WERE DULLER--
--BUT MORE FRIGHTENING SOUNDS, AS SOME OF THE BULLETS FOUND THE ANIMAL, KICKING IT AROUND SPASMODICALLY
COME ONNN, KNOBBY
T'S JUST A DUMB CAT
YOU
YOU KILLED ONE OF MY KITTIES!

YOU SHOULDN'T OUGHTTA HURT LITTLE KITTIES' I DON'T LET NO BASTARD HURT MY LITTLE KITTIES, WITHOUT I BREAK
THE DEATH ROAR
... AND THE SHOCKING AMOUNT OF BLOOD WERE STILL WITH ME WHEN I FORCED MYSELF TO DIVE AT "LICE" AND NOT AWAY FROM HIM.
THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE TO DO.
IF I COULD HAVE GOTTEN OUT THE DOOR WITHOUT ENDING UP LIKE KNOBBY OR THE CAT, I'D HAVE TRIED FOR IT
SK
RUK
A RAPID JERK UPWARDS AND THE METAL BUTT SLAMMED MY MOUTH SHUT, MY TONGUE TASTING BLOOD AS MY FRONT TEETH RIPPED THE INSIDES OF MY UPPER AND LOWER LIPS OPEN.

I COULDN'T GET THE MACHINE GUN LOOSE FROM HIS HANDS, IT WAS AS IF THEY WERE JOINED LIKE SIAMESE TWINS

--PALM TO METAL--

FOREVER DEPENDENT ON EACH OTHER FOR LIFE

HE SLAMMED ME INTO ONE OF THOSE ELECTRIC REFRIGERATORS

IT WAS A CRAZY THING TO NOTICE, BUT I'D NEVER SEEN ONE BEFORE, EVEN THOUGH THE NEWSPAPERS WERE PREDICTING SALES IN THE AREA OF 1½ MILLION THIS YEAR

WHO THE HELL HAD MONEY FOR THIS KIND OF THING? GETAWAY MEN LIKE KNOBBY HALLIHAN!

I'M GOING TO DIE AGAINST ONE I COULD HEAR THE ELECTRICITY HUMMING, OR WAS THAT MY BLOOD AGAIN, AS IN THE STEAM ROOM, HUMMING WITH OXYGEN STARVATION?

HE GRINNED, THE WAY HE HAD THAT TIME IN GRAND CENTRAL THERE WERE BLOODSTAINS HIS YELLOWISH TEETH

I WANTED TO BEG FOR MERCY FROM THAT GRIN, THOUGH I KNEW IT WOULD BE USELESS, I COULDN'T TALK ANYWAY

I BATTERED HIM HE DIDN'T SEEM TO FEEL
THE MACHINE GUN WAS
I HAD THE GREAT TERROR, NOT JUST OF DYING; BUT THAT NOW THE WEAPON AND ICE WERE MORE THAN TWINS,
THAT THE THREE OF US WERE INSEPARABLY CONNECTED YOU SIAMESE TRIPLETS AND ONLY DEATH WOULD RETURN THEM TO THEIR NORMAL SYMBIOSIS
I REACHED ABOVE ME FOR ANYTHING A JAR A CAN AND CAUGHT THE HANDLE OF THE FREEZER
THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THESE NEW FANGLED THINGS
BUT WHAT ? IT SEEMED IMPORTANT, I RECALL
THEY MADE THEIR OWN ICE ONCE SOMEONE IN A MOB HAD ALMOST GASHED MY HEAD OPEN WITH A CHUNK OF ICE
I GROPED AROUND IN THE COLD
THE KITCHEN STARTED GETTING DIMMER.
A LIGHT BULB BURNING OUT
OR LIFE EBBING, PAINFUL DARK OF DEATH COMING, NOT LIKE THE PEACEFUL DARK OF SLEEP
I BASHED THE ICE CHUNK ACROSS HIS FACE, WITH ALL THE STRENGTH I HAD LEFT THERE WAS MORE BLOOD ON HIS CHEEKS
BUT THE SON-OF A BITCH STILL DIDN'T LET GO !

HE JUST APPEARED TO GET ANGRIER, MORE DETERMINED

HE DIDN'T SAY A WORD BUT I COULD FEEL HIM WILLING MY DEATH THE ROOM WAS AT LAST LIGHT NOW MY LEGS WERE UNABLE TO SUPPORT ME ANY LONGER

I SHOVED UPWARDS WITH THE ICE, UNDER THE NOSE BONE CRACKED

THE CRIMSON BLOOD STAINS ON MY MIND OR HIS?

CHA-DA-DA-DA

HE STAGGERED BACKWARDS HIS GUN HAND JERKING UNDER HIS TROUSER FINGER TWITCHED

THREE BULLETS HURTLED UPWARDS TORE A RAGGED LINE ACROSS THE THROAT OF THE MAN WHO FIRED THEM

HE LOOKED STUNNED, AS IF AT ANY SECOND HE WOULD CLAIM THIS CAN'T HAVE HAPPENED!

HE CRADLED THE GUN
I WATCHED HIM THE WAY I WOULD A COBRA WITH HORRIFIED FASCINATION

BLOOD BUBBLED IN HIS MOUTH, BROKE INTO RED SPITTLE. IT TOOK A LOT OF EFFORT FOR HIM TO SPEAK.

TO FINALLY GET THE WORDS OUT. WORDS HUSKILY THICK WITH BLOOD.
SHE DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT

I STAGGERED OUT OF THE KITCHEN, ONLY IT DIDN'T SEEM LIKE A KITCHEN ANYMORE. THE LIVING ROOM WASN'T MUCH BETTER.
I WANTED TO LIE DOWN. I WAS VERY HOT IN THE VAST SILENCE OF THE ROOM.
MY HAND WAS TREMBLING AS I HALED THE PREGNANT MY TUKKA' AT [illegible] I HAD A TOMMY GUN TRASHING
I HAD A VIVID PICTURE IN MY HEAD OF AMANDA IN THE GARAGE THAT DAY WHEN SHE HAD SCREAMED
BLAM
AND I HAD WANTED TO TOUCH HER SO BADLY I COULD HARDLY RESTRAIN MYSELF
LISTEN CLOSE I CALLED AWHILE BACK ABOUT A WOMAN WHO IS GOING TO BE MURDERED OUT ON CONEY ISLAND TODAY
MY FATHER
I REMEMBER YOU TAKE MY ADVICE YOU LAY OFF THE SAUCE AND STAY OUT OF THE SUN
I KNEEL AT [illegible] AND WE WERE STANDING THERE
SHE LOOKED FRIGHTENED SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT SHE WAS GOING TO SEE IN THAT ROOM BUT SHE KNEW IT WOULD CHANGE HER WHOLE WORLD
IT WAS A LOOK I UNDERSTOOD ONE NIGHT BACK IN FEBRUARY I HAD HAD THE SAME LOOK

WHAT'LL I CAN YOU SAY TO A WOMAN WHOSE HOME HAS BEEN TURNED INTO A SLAUGHTER HOUSE
12:22 PM
THE MORNING HOURS WERE HEATING UP HAD TO BE IN THE 90S NOW WITH THE HUMIDITY CLOSING IN ON A HUNDRED WHAT COME CALL A 4TH OF JULY SCORCHER
D TRAIN CONEY ISLAND

THE BMT TRAIN LINE WAS NEWLY BUILT. ANYONE IN MANHATTAN COULD GET OUT TO CONEY ISLAND BEACH NOW. RICH MEN AND POOR MEN COULD STAND TOGETHER ON THE BEACH SAND, CROWDED TOGETHER, SEEKING RELIEF FROM THE ONLY THING THEY HAD IN COMMON, THE HEAT.
THE DIFFERENCE WAS WHERE THE RICH AND POOR WOULD RETURN AT DAY'S END, THE RICH TO ESTATES WITH SHADED TERRACES, AND THE POOR TO CRAMPED, HUMID APARTMENTS, AND OTHERS TO HARD SIDEWALKS AND DARK ALLEYWAYS.
I TALKED TO THE TRAIN AS IF IT WERE SENTIENT
I BEGGED IT TO MOVE FASTER
1:38 P.M.
BY THE TIME I REACHED THE LAST STOP AND RUSHED OUT ONTO HOLIDAY-CELEBRATION CROWDED SURF AVENUE, I WAS FIGHTING IMAGES OF JOYCE DEAD
I HAD BEEN TOO LATE FOR JOYCE
I HADN'T EVEN COME CLOSE TO SAVING LITTLE LIZZIE.
THERE WAS A FRIGHTENING THOUGHT I COULD NOT REPRESS: WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THINGS WILL BE ANY DIFFERENT THIS TIME?

PLEASE, SIR! DON'T LET THE BLOOD HAVE ALREADY BEEN SPILLED
I FOUND JOHN AND AUGUSTA MALONE JUST OFF STILLWELL AVENUE
AUGUSTA MALONE LOOKED AT ME WITH STERN DISAPPROVAL. THE WORLD WAS CHANGING, AND NOT FOR THE BETTER
WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?
THERE'S A FEW PLACES WHERE THE MALONES CAN'T ORDER PEOPLE TO FADE AWAY
STOP THAT!
IT'S A SAD SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS, BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO LIVE WITH IT
REMEMBER ME, MALONE? I'M SUPPOSED TO BE COOKING IN YOUR STOVE RIGHT NOW
PLEASE, I
WHERE'S AMANDA AND VALENTINE?
I'M TELLING YOU, NOTH
SWUK
AUGUSTA'S VOICE WAS NEAR HYSTERIA IF IT WAS NINE FOR THAT MATTER
LISTEN YOU GUTLESS YOU LET'S, ASS I COULD GIVE HIM A GOOD GODDAMN ABOUT YOUR MONEY RUFF AN MAKING SCHEMES YOUR RIBBONS NIC PARACHUTES' BUT F THEY COST AMANDA HER LIFE YOU CAN BE RE IT COST YOU
SWAP
DEARLY'
AMANDA'S FE
WHERE ARE THEY?
THE THE ROLLERCOASTER'

DAMN IT!
WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE THERE ARE LADIES PRESENT
THERE WAS NO USE ARGUING WITH AUGUSTA MALONE SHE WAS LIVING IN SOME REFINED DIGNIFIED, ARISTOCRATIC WORLD WHICH HAD BEEN TAUGHT TO HER SINCE SHE'D BEEN A LITTLE GIRL, AND TO WHICH SHE WOULD RETREAT DESPERATELY, AS IF HER LIFE DEPENDED ON IT
I THREW AWAY THE DAMN TRENCHCOAT, THOUGH I COULDN'T AFFORD SUCH WASTE SOMEHOW, THE ACT HAD VAGUELY SACRILEGIOUS UNDERTONES
PERHAPS IT DID
CYCLONE
WHERE I WAS--
THE CYCLONE!
I SAW HER HAIR AS THEY WENT OVER THE PLUNGE, HAIR CATCHING SUNLIGHT.
SO ALIVE!
SO DAMNED ALIVE!
JOYCE DEAD!
ADMIT IT DEAD
AND I COULD SEE HER STRUGGLING, AND THERE WAS A SCREAM IN MY HEAD! TOO LATE AGAIN!

NO, DAMMIT!
I WILL NOT
LET IT BE
THE END
THEY WERE ON THE DOWNWARD SIDE OF THE PRECIPICE, THE AIR FILLED WITH LAUGHING SCREAMS.
THE TEAR IN THE SIDE OF MY HAND, FROM WHERE I HAD BATTERED THE STEAM GRATING, SPILLED NEW BLOOD AS I GRIPPED THE GUN BUTT
THE BLOOD WAS WARM THIS TIME
I SCREAMED HIS NAME, LIKE A RAGING CURSE, AS I PULLED THE TRIGGER IT WAS A TORTURED SCREAM, LOUDER THAN GUN BLAST OR METAL WHEELS HAMMERING METAL TRACKS
THE SCAFFOLDING SHOOK WITH THE HURTLING PASSAGE.
VALENTINNE!
THE TRACKS VIBRATED BENEATH MY FEET, MAKING IT DIFFICULT TO FOCUS ON THE GUNSIGHT

I DON'T KNOW WHICH HE HEARD, HIS NAME SCREAMED THE WAY A HOLY MAN WOULD RANT AGAINST SATAN OR THE BULLET HITTING
KRIS-
-KHANDI!
GET OFFA THE TRACKS! YOU'RE GONNA GET KILT!
THE BRAKES WERE SCREECHING, A SHRIEK THAT TURNED LAUGHING SCREAMS TO REAL, PANICKY SCREAMS. SCREAMS WITHOUT THRILLS, ONLY MORTAL FEARS
BUT THE BRAKEMAN'S EFFORTS WOULD NOT STOP THE COASTER BEFORE IT PASSED THE SPOT WHERE I WAS STANDING.
VALENTINE ! YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH ! COME BACK HERE !
Yaiiii
AMANDA'S VOICE HELD THE SAME RAGE MINE HAD, BUT MORE THAN ANGER, ALSO CONFUSION AND BETRAYAL
MY PULSE LEAPT WITH TRIUMPH AT HEARING HER VOICE, IN ANY FASHION
IT MEANT SHE WAS ALIVE ! IT MEANT I HAD NOT BEEN TOO LATE !

VALENTINE RAN PAST STEEPLECHASE PARK, WHICH SELF-BILLED ITSELF AS THE FUNNY PLACE." NEITHER OF US WAS LAUGHING
VALENTINE DID NOT RUN AS IF HE WERE SATAN, HE RAN AS IF PURSUED BY SATAN AND HORDES OF SCREAMING DEMONS WHO WOULD DRAG HIM TO SOME CONCEPTUAL HELL ONLY HIS EYES COULD SEE
I REALIZED I WAS HIS SATAN
WE RAN FAST WEST IS TH ST, UNDER AN UNGUENTINE BEAUTY, SHOWING GREAT GAMS AND A LARGE ENTICING SMILE
IT MADE ME THINK OF THE WAY MY SKIN HAD FELT IN THE STEAM ROOM, AND THE WAY IT DID NOW, CHAFING AGAINST MY CLOTHES.
I DIDN'T THINK UNGUENTINE WOULD HELP MUCH
LUNA PARK HAD BEEN A LAND OF FANTASIA DURING THE LATE 1890s
ITS ALPINE RIDE HAD SIMULATED THE SWISS ALPS.

LUNA
CHUTES
THE FIRST AIR CONDITIONERS IN AMERICA WERE INSTALLED, HIDDEN WITHIN THE RIDE'S UPPER SLOPES, WHERE THEY WOULD SHOOT OUT FRIGID BLASTS OF AIR THAT WOULD CONVINCE BROOKLYNITES THEY HAD TRULY SCALED THE ALPS
BUT LUNA PARK, AS MAD STEEPLECHASE, HAD BURNED DOWN A NUMBER OF TIMES IN THE INTERVENING YEARS THE ALPINE RIDE WAS A DREAM BURNED TO CINDERS
THE CHUTES STILL CHURNED AND FOAMED
I'D NEVER BEEN DOWN THE DAMN THINGS
I'D SEEN FATTY ARBUCKLE AND BUSTER KEATON DO A HEADER DOWN IT IN A MOVIE--
DAMN IF I COULD REMEMBER THE NAME OF IT
THE RIDE DID NOT LOOK MUCH DIFFERENT THAN IT HAD IN THAT OLD SILENT MOVIE I'D SEEN, MAYBE FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

BUSTER AND FATTY HAD GONE DOWN THE CHUTES IN A CAR.
VALENTINE AND I WENT WITHOUT ONE
IT WAS NOT A GRACEFUL DESCENT
IT FELT AS IF WE WERE TUMBLING DOWN NIAGARA FALLS, WITHOUT BENEFIT OF A BARREL.
AND THEN WE SPRAWLED OFF THE RAMP EDGE.
WE WERE FALLING THROUGH AIR FOR ABOUT THREE SECONDS--
--BEFORE WE HIT THE POOL BELOW.

THE COOL WATER FELT GOOD I WANTED TO LET IT SOAK THE RAZOR BURNS AWAY

BUT THAT DAMN VALENTINE WAS STILL MOVING

HE WAS YOUNGER

HE HADN'T BEEN LOCKED IN A STEAM ROOM

SHOT AT--

-AND BATTERED

THE THRONG OF MERRY MAKERS HARDLY NOTICED HIM

THE DAMN SON-OF A-BITCH VAULTED THE BOARDWALK RAILING ONTO CONEY ISLAND BEACH, LIKE AN OLYMPIC POLE-VAULTER GOING FOR THE GOLD

I FOLLOWED, BUT WITH NONE OF THE ENERGY. THE GASH IN MY ARMPIT STARTED TO BLEED AGAIN

THERE WERE COPS EVERYWHERE

OKAY, BUDDY I SEEN YOUR NAVEL. NOW WHAT'S YOUR NAME? YOU'RE GETTING WRITTEN UP AND TAKING A HIKE TO THE POKEY.

GIMME YOUR NAME.

TAKE YOUR PICK. GUY KIBBEE OR SALOMÉ

DON'T MOUTH WISE, JACKASS!

FREDDIE BICKENHACKER HAD MADE BOOK THE LAW WOULD BE OUT IN ABUNDANCE

HERE I WAS CHASING A MURDERER, WHILE THE LAW WAS BUSY ARRESTING GUYS FOR WEARING BATHING TRUNKS AND SHOWING SAGGING BELLIES.

THERE WAS A MORAL THERE SOMEWHERE--

--BUT IT WASN'T ONE I WANTED TO THINK TOO MUCH ABOUT

WE RAN PAST THE CROWDS AND WHITE BEACH SAND INTO THE PEBBLY, DESERTED AREA NEARING THE ROCKY COAST PROMONTORY. WHERE THE HELL WAS HE HEADING?

MY BREATHING WAS LOUDER THAN THE CRASHING WAVES. DESPITE MY COMMANDS, MY LEGS WERE SLOWING, THREATENING TO BUCKLE AND BRING ME TO MY KNEES, GASPING.
HE WAS HEADING TOWARD SOME SORT OF PIER
A LADDER!
PRIVATE BEACH PRIVATE PROPERTY NO TRESPASSING
A PRIVATE JETTY THRUSTED OUT, DEFIANTLY FRAGILE, INTO THE ATLANTIC
I TRIED TO CONVINCE MY BODY THAT IT SHOULD CLIMB THE LADDER, BUT I COULD ONLY CLING TO IT, LISTENING TO MY LABORED BREATHING IT REMINDED ME OF MY FATHER, DYING, HIS EYES AWARE THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO GET ENOUGH AIR.
I HAD A NEWER MEMORY, OF THAT HORSE LYING IN THE MIDDLE OF BROADWAY, ALL LATHERED, HEAVING FLESH, THE HEART GIVING OUT
AND THAT MEMORY BROUGHT BACK THE HISS IN THE STEAM ROOM
RRUURRR
I HEARD SOMETHING NOT IN MEMORY
HERE
NOW!
A MOTOR!
OH, DAMN IT TO HELL! VALENTINE'S PLANE HE'D TOLD ME HE WAS FLYING IT OUT TO CONEY ISLAND.
HE WAS GOING TO ESCAPE, AFTER ALL THAT RUNNING AND FALLING AND DOGGED PURSUIT IT WASN'T RIGHT! COME ON, DUSK! A LITTLE MORE PUSH AND SHOVE.

I HEARD THE MOTOR REVVING UP

SAW THE PLANE PULLING AWAY!

TOO LATE!

WATER SLAPPED THE PONTOONS LIKE A HARSH, VIOLENT HAND.

I WAS HALF DELIRIOUS

THE WORLD WAS HAZY, UNREAL.

EVEN THE PLANE WAS SOMEWHAT A BLUR.

IF I'D BEEN CLEAR-HEADED, I PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET MY FEET TO LEAVE THE PIER.

I HIT METAL, WHICH MEANT I HAD MANAGED TO GRAB HOLD OF SOME PART OF THE PLANE--

--BUT THERE WAS SPRAY ALL AROUND ME--

-LIKE A STORM SWEPT UPWARDS RATHER THAN DOWN!

THE PLANE BEGAN TO GAIN SPEED, THUMP, THUMP, THUMPING, BOUNCING ON THE OCEAN SURFACE, THE LAWARD RAIN BECOMING A GREAT FORCE

THE WIND WHIPPED PAST MY FACE, AND DESPITE THE GALE, IT BROUGHT THE WORLD BACK INTO FOCUS.

I CLUNG TO THE GUIDE WIRES, THE OCEAN RACING BELOW ME, SLASHED LIKE A WOUND BY OUR PASSAGE.

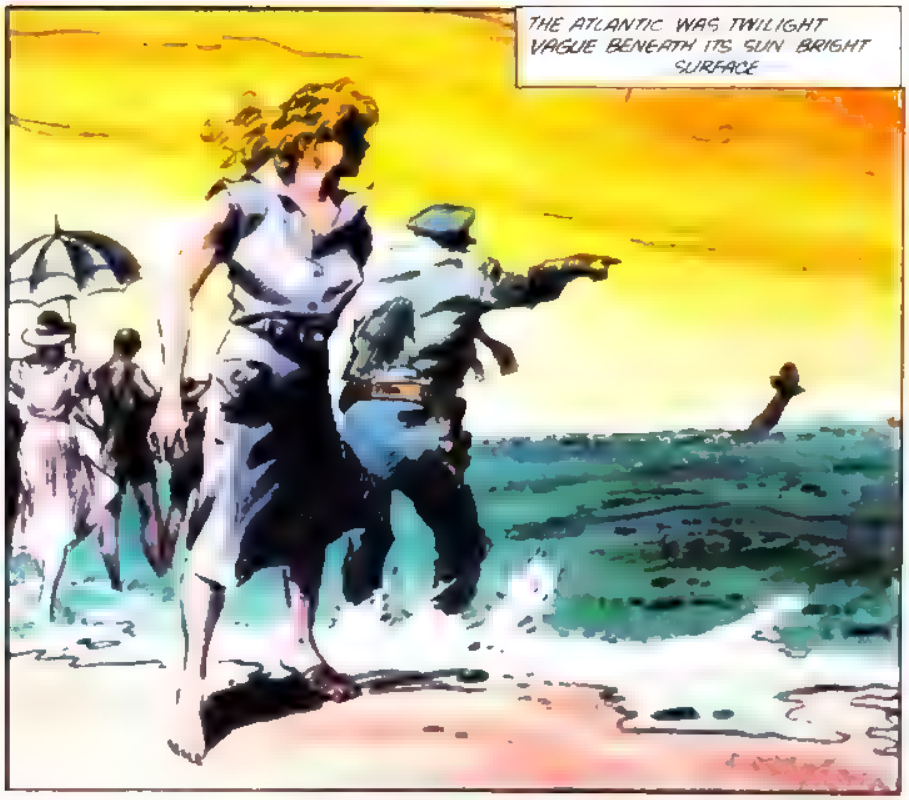
FEAR WAS IN HIS EYES, JUST AS IT HAD BEEN ON THAT NIGHT HE TRIED TO SHOOT CRANSTON

GOOD GOD! ARE YOU NUTS? GET OFF!

HE LASHED OUT AT ME WITH THE SAME WILD, PANICKY BLOWS, BUT THIS TIME HE DIDN'T HAVE A GUN

I MANAGED TO GET A HANDHOLD ON HIS TAILORED SHIRT.

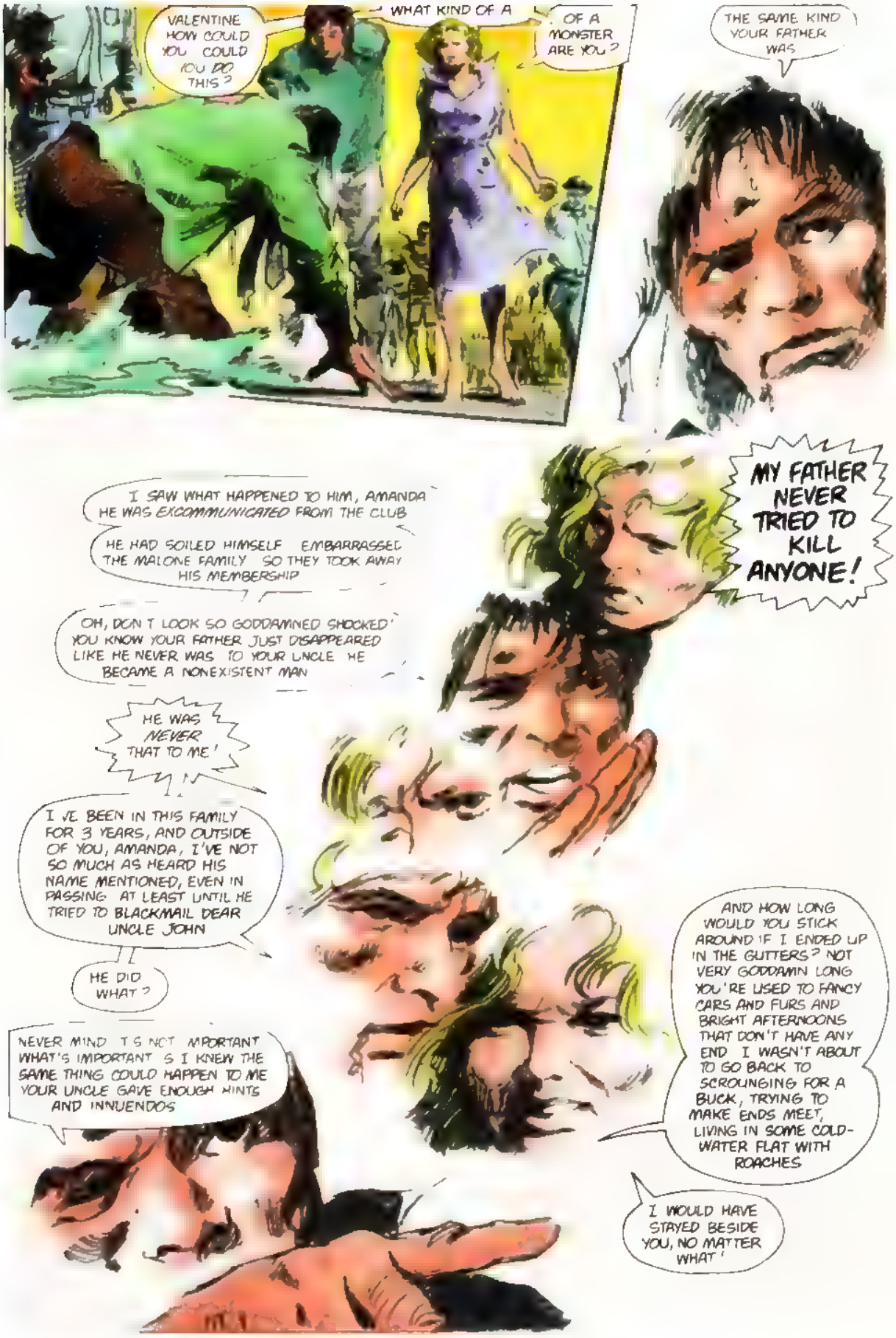
YOU ALMOST TOOK THE LIGHT OUT OF HER EYES.
YOU ALMOST SILENCED THE QUICK LAUGH AND SHARP WIT
I
WON'T
LET GO
YOU BASTARD!
YOU'LL HAVE TO CHOP MY HAND FROM ITS WRIST, IT'S THE ONLY WAY YOU'LL GET THOSE FINGERS LOOSE!
THERE WAS A TEARING NOISE, A TERRIBLE METALLIC RIP -
-- AND THE WORLD TORE WITH IT, THEN WENT MORE THAN HAZY, IT SPUN TOPSY-TURVY
THIS WASN'T THE SAME AS A FALL DOWN A WATERY INCLINE
THERE WAS NO SENSE OF WHERE ONE WAS OR WHERE ONE WAS GOING--
NO CONTROL OVER LIMBS OR BODY.
-- JUST A HURTLING FRAIL SENSATION, A MINUSCULE ELEMENT CAUGHT IN AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE MAELSTROM


THE ATLANTIC WAS TWILIGHT VAGUE BENEATH ITS SUN BRIGHT SURFACE

- AND CONSPICUOUSLY SILENT

I STILL HAD HOLD OF VALENTINE WHEN I BROKE THE SURFACE.
THE SALTWATER STUNG ME IN A DOZEN PLACES, MOST NOTABLY MY ARMPIT

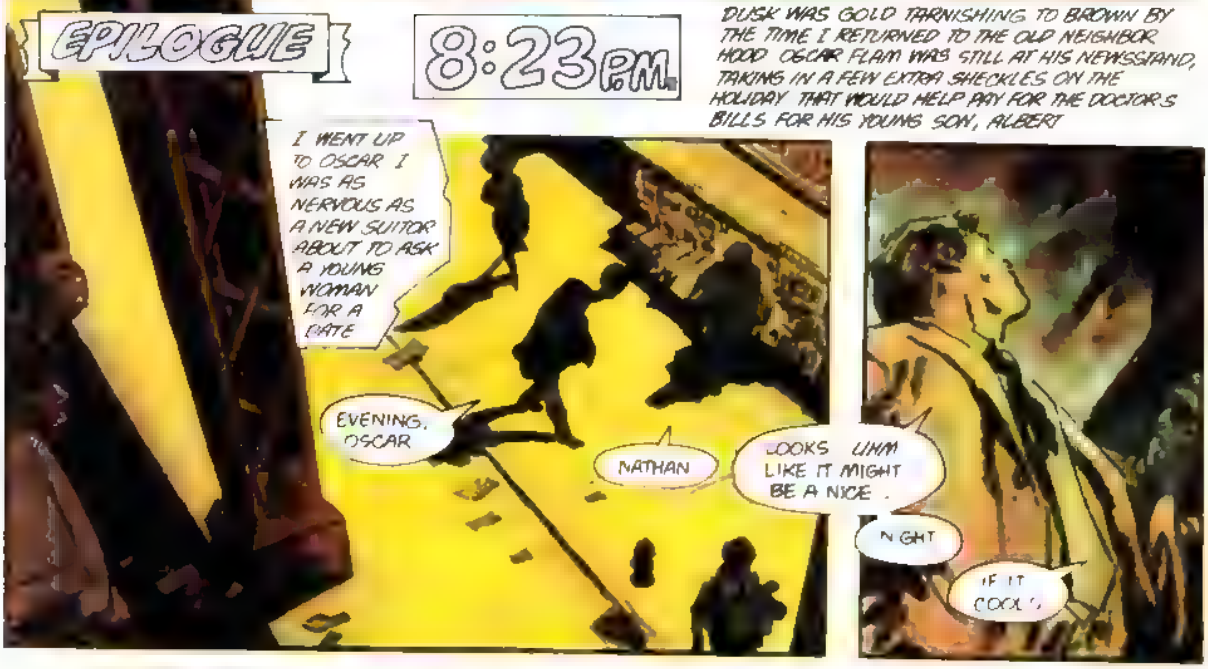
I SAW AMANDA
I SAW THAT SOME POLICEMEN HAD BEEN DISTRACTED FROM THEIR IMPORTANT DUTY OF ARRESTING BARE CHESTED GUYS
I STAGGERED OUT OF THE SURF
I DID NOT FEEL TRIUMPHANT
ONLY EXHAUSTED


VALENTINE HOW COULD YOU COULD YOU DO THIS?
WHAT KIND OF A
. OF A MONSTER ARE YOU?
THE SAME KIND YOUR FATHER WAS
I SAW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM, AMANDA HE WAS EXCOMMUNICATED FROM THE CLUB
HE HAD SOILED HIMSELF EMBARRASSED THE MALONE FAMILY SO THEY TOOK AWAY HIS MEMBERSHIP
MY FATHER NEVER TRIED TO KILL ANYONE!
OH, DON'T LOOK SO GODDAMNED SHOCKED! YOU KNOW YOUR FATHER JUST DISAPPEARED LIKE HE NEVER WAS TO YOUR UNCLE HE BECAME A NONEXISTENT MAN
HE WAS NEVER THAT TO ME!
I'VE BEEN IN THIS FAMILY FOR 3 YEARS, AND OUTSIDE OF YOU, AMANDA, I'VE NOT SO MUCH AS HEARD HIS NAME MENTIONED, EVEN IN PASSING AT LEAST UNTIL HE TRIED TO BLACKMAIL DEAR UNCLE JOHN
HE DID WHAT?
NEVER MIND IT'S NOT IMPORTANT WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS I KNEW THE SAME THING COULD HAPPEN TO ME YOUR UNCLE GAVE ENOUGH HINTS AND INNUENDOS
AND HOW LONG WOULD YOU STICK AROUND IF I ENDED UP IN THE GUTTERS? NOT VERY GODDAMN LONG YOU'RE USED TO FANCY CARS AND FURS AND BRIGHT AFTERNOONS THAT DON'T HAVE ANY END I WASN'T ABOUT TO GO BACK TO SCROUNGING FOR A BUCK, TRYING TO MAKE ENDS MEET, LIVING IN SOME COLD-WATER FLAT WITH ROACHES
I WOULD HAVE STAYED BESIDE YOU, NO MATTER WHAT!

THAT S
WHAT
LIKE TO THINK'

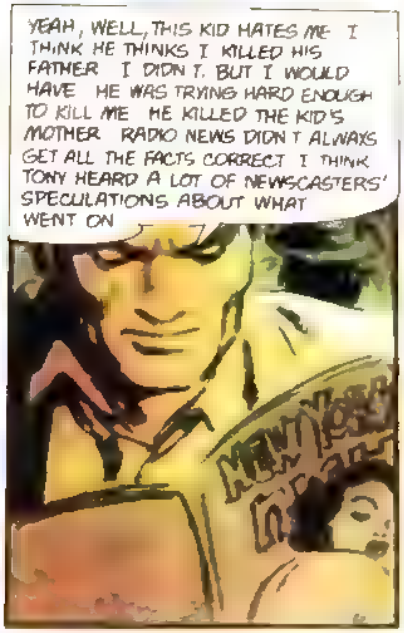
WHUK

THAT S
FOR NOT HAVING ENOUGH FAITH IN ME


EPILOGUE
8:23 P.M.
DUSK WAS GOLD TARNISHING TO BROWN BY THE TIME I RETURNED TO THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD OSCAR FLAM WAS STILL AT HIS NEWSSTAND, TAKING IN A FEW EXTRA SHECKLES ON THE HOLIDAY THAT WOULD HELP PAY FOR THE DOCTOR S BILLS FOR HIS YOUNG SON, ALBERT
I WENT UP TO OSCAR I WAS AS NERVOUS AS A NEW SUITOR ABOUT TO ASK A YOUNG WOMAN FOR A DATE
EVENING, OSCAR
NATHAN
LOOKS UHM LIKE IT MIGHT BE A NICE
NIGHT
IF IT DOES'

YOU UH MIND IF I ASK YOU A QUESTION
OF COURSE NOT, NATHAN

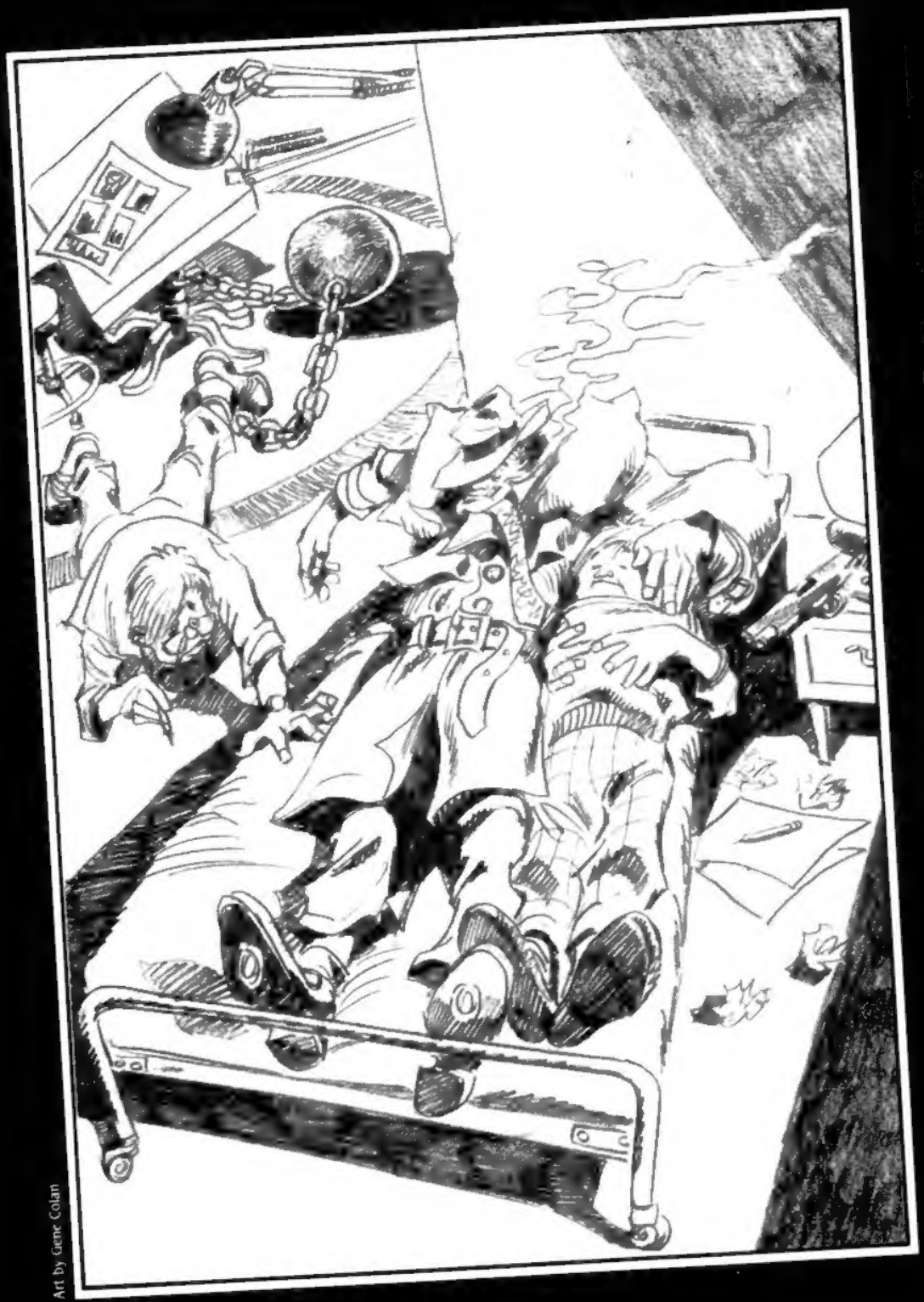
YOU VE GOT A SON YOU EVER HAVE, YOU KNOW, TROUBLE TALKING TO HIM?
I TRY TO TALK TO HIM EVERY NIGHT I TELL HIM I LOVE HIM I TELL HIM HIS FATHER IS NOT PERFECT


YEAH, WELL, THIS KID HATES ME I THINK HE THINKS I KILLED HIS FATHER I DIDN T. BUT I WOULD HAVE HE WAS TRYING HARD ENOUGH TO KILL ME HE KILLED THE KID'S MOTHER RADIO NEWS DIDN T ALWAYS GET ALL THE FACTS CORRECT I THINK TONY HEARD A LOT OF NEWSCASTERS' SPECULATIONS ABOUT WHAT WENT ON

THIS IS BAD.
HOW DO I GET THROUGH TO HIM, OSCAR?
I ASK HIM HOW HE FEELS ABOUT ME, HE SAYS NOTHING.
YOU HAVE TO ASK HIM NOT HOW HE FEELS ABOUT YOU, NATHAN...
YOU HAVE TO TELL HIM HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT HIM.
YOU HAVE TO OPEN YOUR HEART TO HIM. THIS IS NOT EASY TO DO, NOT FOR A MAN LIKE YOU.
BUT YOU TAKE MANY RISKS, AND IF YOU WANT TO REACH HIM, YOU MUST TAKE RISKS HERE. YOU RISK HIS SAYING "TO HELL WITH YOU," NOT THAT A CHILD WOULD PUT IT THAT WAY, BUT...
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING.
NATHAN?
NO NEED TO SAY IT, OSCAR. IT'S FORGOTTEN. I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW.
I'M...
...GLAD YOU ASKED ME.
I'M GLAD I DID TOO!
11:51 P.M.
ITALIAN HARLEM WAS LIT BY FIREWORKS, REDS AND GREENS AND YELLOWS, EXPLODING WITH THE PROMISE AND JOY THE IMMIGRANTS HAD NOT EXACTLY FOUND WHEN STEPPING THROUGH THE PORTALS OF ELLIS ISLAND.
THE STATUE OF LIBERTY HAD WELCOMED THEM, BUT THE LAND BEYOND WAS STILL ALIEN AND SOMETIMES BRUTAL, AND A FEW DECIDED THE ONLY COMMINGLING ALLOWED WITH THE NATIVE INHABITANTS AND ATTENDANT CHANCES FOR PROMISED RICHES WAS TO DO ILLEGITIMATE ACTS FOR THE ESTABLISHED LEGITIMATE.
TONY GULINO'S FATHER HAD BEEN ONE OF THOSE MEN. I FOUND TONY, A SOLITARY WITNESS TO THE PROMISE AND EXPLOSION.

GET OUTTA HERE! I DON'T WANNA SEE YOU NO MORE!
I'M NOT GOING UNTIL I SPEAK TO YOU, YOU GOT THAT?
SCRAM!
YOU GO SOME-PLACE ELSE!
YOU KILLED MY OLD MAN!
NO, I DIDN'T, TONY! I MIGHT HAVE, I WON'T LIE TO YOU! IT'S NOT MY PLACE TO SPEAK OF WHAT HE DID...BUT I KNOW YOU REMEMBER HOW I WAS WITH YOUR MOMMA... AND HOW I CARED FOR HER AND YOU AND JENNIE.
IT'S OKAY, TONY. IT'S OKAY TO CRY. LISTEN... I LOST YOUR MOM... I LOST A LITTLE GIRL I NEVER EVEN MET BUT WHOM I WANTED TO SAVE.
I LOST A MAN I WAS HIRED TO PROTECT...
I LOST MY OWN FATHER... TO A SICKNESS I COULDN'T FIGHT...COULDN'T SLUG.
I DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU, TONY. YOU HEAR ME? I WANT IT TO BE JAKE WITH US.
AND THEN... MAYBE IT WON'T BE SO BAD FOR EITHER ONE OF US.
I DIDN'T KNOW IF HE HEARD WHAT I SAID OR NOT. I DIDN'T KNOW IF HE UNDERSTOOD, EVEN IF HE DID HEAR.
ONLY TIME WOULD TELL.
FIREWORKS LIT UP THE WORLD AND EXPLODED.
THE NIGHT WAS FULL OF BEAUTY AND DESTRUCTION.
IT HAD BEEN A LONG 4TH.
END

Gene, Nate and Don get together and celebrate the completion of NATHANIEL DUSK II



Art by Gene Colan

G'night guys!

"I love a mystery...

and NATHANIEL DUSK fairly drips the hard-boiled ambience of Chandler and Hammett. The cynicism reminds me a bit, also, of my favorite detective-type protagonist, John D. MacDonald's world-weary Travis McGee. And overall, it also recalls Humphrey Bogart.

NATHANIEL DUSK...is the type of comic which should win awards. It's about people and their emotions. As I have loved their work in the past, I loved this newest collaboration between Don McGregor and Gene Colan, and I love the fact that DC has taken the risk and offered us an offbeat, new, and terrific comic book."

David McDonnell
Editor, Starlog magazine

"NATHANIEL DUSK is just about the most exciting project I've seen from DC since Jack Kirby's "Fourth World" books. The writing is mature and compelling. McGregor handles a well-known and loved genre adroitly and with an absolute minimum of stereotyping. Indeed, as soon as Nate starts to speak we see that this is no predictable cardboard character. Here is a multifaceted man whom we will have to get to know over time, even if we do sense immediately that he is someone we will like.

Colan is the master storyteller. His ability to evoke mood and tension through an interplay of light and shadow is used here to fully charged advantage. It seems the perfect complement to McGregor's tale of a not-so-hardboiled New York detective. Both script and artwork ring deliciously true to the period. It is graphic storytelling at its finest...a seamless blending of art and idea that effortlessly carries the reader down a fast, quickening stream of adventure and intrigue."

Howard Zimmerman
Editor Emeritus, Starlog magazine

CRIME / MYSTERY